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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 12/18/08

INDEX:

- (1) Japan must not just follow the strong (Mainichi)
  - (2) Editorial: ASDF pulls out of Iraq; Mission tested country on its proper role (Yomiuri)
  - (3) Editorial: Refueling alone not enough (Nikkei)
  - (4) Civic groups engaging in campaign opposing U.S. Army's forward command center at Camp Zama: "Directly-connected with battlefield," "Setup has been strengthened" (Mainichi)
  - (5) Administrative Reform Minister Akira Amari: Aso administration places priority on how future generations will assess it, and not on current popularity (Tokyo Shimbun)
- (Corrected copy) Foreign financial institutions cut 3,100 jobs, more than 10 PERCENT of Japanese payrolls, since last August (Nikkei)

ARTICLES:

- (1) Japan must not just follow the strong

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Abridged slightly)  
December 18, 2008

By Hiroshi Komatsu, deputy editor in chief

Appreciated by the United States as proof of its alliance with Japan, the Self Defense Forces have accomplished their Iraq mission with no casualties. This owes much to the troops' discipline and

devotion. Even so, I object to calling this Japan's success story. The reason is because Japan has opted for siding with the strong (United States) purely for its own national interests and also because we have not discussed our association with the Iraq war in our own terms.

Absurd logic has been used over the last five years. (In April), the Nagoya High Court ruled the Air Self-Defense Force's airlift mission unconstitutional, but then ASDF Chief of Staff Toshio Tamogami brushed aside it, saying: "I couldn't care less." The top SDF officer looking down on the court ruling, the lawmakers sitting on the sidelines, the Diet regarding Iraq and Afghanistan only as a political tool... In Japanese history, security discussions have never been treated so lightly.

With the widespread belief that anyone can say anything, our society has slackened off. I wonder how many people have kept in the minds the SDF troops who expended sweat in Samawah and Baghdad.

Japanese political leaders have neither earnestly discussed if there was any justification for the military intervention in Iraq that cost several tens of thousands of lives nor have they expressed remorse and regret for the misinformation about the weapons of mass destruction. After deciding to follow the strong, Iraq has become someone else's problem to many Japanese people.

Over the last five years, the world has been struggling to overcome the Iraq war's negative legacy of how to achieve the coexistence of Western and Islamic societies, not to mention the proliferation of terrorism. The United States, having sowed the seeds for such a

TOKYO 00003447 002 OF 007

situation, has learned through the Iraq war that resolving problems takes more than military power. With the advent of a multi-polar age including China, India, Russia, and the European Union (EU), a search for a new international order has begun.

Having an alliance with the United States for a half a century is an invaluable asset for Japanese diplomacy. But excessive reliance on the United States to learn of the outside world only through the prism of the United States often makes it difficult to see what is actually going on in the world. The yardstick called the Japan-U.S. alliance is longer sufficient for Tokyo to use in determining its positions on finance, energy, the global environment, food, and all other challenges we face.

How will Japan be able to provide support to Afghanistan will next be tested. The incoming Obama administration that advocates new alliances and rebuilding alliances is certain to ask Japan for its ideas. Japan must think with its own head what it can do for the peace of the region. Japan must not repeat the folly of losing its ability to think independently as a result of blindly siding with the strong based on its myopic logic of pursuing narrow national interests.

(2) Editorial: ASDF pulls out of Iraq; Mission tested country on its proper role

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)  
December 18, 2008

The Self-Defense Forces successfully ended an historic mission in Iraq. Three Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) C-130 transport aircraft, which had been used for airlifting operations between Kuwait and Iraq, are now on their way home.

The ASDF flew 821 missions over five years, transporting approximately 46,500 personnel, including multinational force and UN personnel, and 673 tons of cargo. The government decided to pull out the ASDF troops, coinciding with the expiration at the end of this year of the UN Security Council's resolution that had asked each country to cooperation in assisting Iraq's reconstruction.

The ASDF deserves high praise for completing its mission without even one casualty. The reason is because of the meticulous care taken to secure the safety of its personnel.

Since the dispatch of ASDF and Ground Self-Defense Force personnel to Iraq involved unprecedented risk, it put to the test what the proper role should be for Japan.

If the reconstruction activities had collapsed and Iraq had turned into terrorists' haven, crude oil prices would have soared. The peace and stability of the Middle East would also have been undermined.

In such a critical situation, should Japan continue to provide just financial assistance, while entirely entrusting dangerous missions to other countries, as it did in the (first) Gulf war? Or should it play a role in physically supporting international operations, resolved to face a certain level of danger?

By opting for the latter, Japan, one can say, was not wrong. It has taken a step away from its usual sort of international activity.

TOKYO 00003447 003 OF 007

Even though Japan had been engaged in transport activities overseas connected with disaster relief operations, this was the first time for the ASDF to be overseas on a mission for such a long period of time. The ASDF must have learned the know-how on how to effectively operate through its joint activities with other countries' forces.

The lessons learned during the mission, including how to use threat information obtained in advance in efforts to secure safety and what equipment is most useful.

It is not enough for the SDF just to introduce expensive equipment and carry out exercises in order to be ready for a direct emergency. It must proactively use troops in actual missions, including dispatching personnel in the event of domestic disasters and international peace cooperation activities.

Even though the ASDF unit has been withdrawn, Japan must continue its assistance by other means, such as providing official development assistance.

Public security in Iraq has improved. However, the situation there is far from reaching the level that allows regular economic activities.

Japan announced a \$5 billion ODA program for Iraq in 2003, of which grant aid totaling 1.5 billion yen has been disbursed. However, of the 3.5 billion dollars for reimbursable loan aid, assistance for the construction of a power generation system and the construction of ports and harbors costing \$2.5 billion has just entered the implementation stage. The specifics of aid to be financed with the remaining \$1 billion have yet to be set.

Japan should rush to implement the remaining payable loan aid. It should also get private-sector business and investment off the ground. Otherwise, its Iraq reconstruction assistance effort will remain incomplete.

(3) Editorial: Refueling alone not enough

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 17, 2008

The Diet has now enacted a law allowing a one-year extension of the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean. The government will not have to call off the MSDF's refueling mission there unlike last year. However, the situation in Afghanistan is reportedly going from bad to worse. The international community has growing expectations for Japan to do something more than refueling.

The two prime ministers, Shinzo Abe and Yasuo Fukuda, were driven out of office. That is primarily because the refueling legislation could not be expected to clear the Diet. This is a result of all-out resistance put up by the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) with a majority of seats held by the opposition

parties in the House of Councillors.

This time around, the DPJ did not resist that far. This is probably one of the DPJ's tactics aiming to have the House of Representatives dissolved for a general election. However, it may be a sense of realism that envisages a change of government. We would like to

TOKYO 00003447 004 OF 007

think of it that way.

Japan's refueling activities are appreciated to a certain extent in the international community. In this sense, the cost efficiency of such activities is high. However, the Afghan situation is growing in severity. The international community wants Japan to do something more than just refueling.

In a Dec. 9 media-sponsored symposium at Keidanren Kaikan Hall in Tokyo, ambassadors and ministers to Japan from eight countries expressed expectations for Japan.

U.S. Ambassador Schieffer said: "We understand that Japan cannot send the Self-Defense Forces to Afghanistan. But civilians can go." British Ambassador Warren asked Japan to send helicopters or provide financial assistance for sending them. Canadian Ambassador Fried pointed out the importance of activities in three areas-defense, development, and diplomacy.

They all called on Japan to do something more than refueling. Above all, U.S. President-elect Obama and his administration are insisting on pulling U.S. troops out of Iraq. Meanwhile, the Obama administration is ready to send more troops to Afghanistan for the war on terror. Obama is expected to call on the international community to cooperate.

In the Afghan battle, more than 1,000 soldiers from at least 22 countries died. The number of casualties is on the increase. That is why the international community needs to beef up its solidarity. Japan can hardly blink.

There are no more than 100 Japanese nationals, including diplomats and aid workers, serving in Afghanistan. The Foreign Ministry has warned Japanese citizens to evacuate that country. There is a dilemma about carrying out civilian activities. But as Ambassador Schieffer said, "Every country takes a risk by participating."

(4) Civic groups engaging in campaign opposing U.S. Army's forward command center at Camp Zama: "Directly-connected with battlefield," "Setup has been strengthened"

MAINICHI (Page 20) (Full)  
Sagami Edition, December 18, 2008

How do those who monitor the moves at and collect information on Camp Zama see the past year since the transfer of the U.S. Army's forward command center to the site?

Tokio Kaneko (58), Sagamihara City Assembly member, who is continuing monitoring activities at Camp Zama, said, "The setup has been strengthened with the deployment of military vehicles and communications facilities." He noted that many high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWV) that can be used on the desert, fitted with such weapons as machineguns, are now deployed there.

Junko Hara (56), a member of a civic group that is continuing a campaign against the forward command center, watched soldiers engaging in drills with the guns pointed directly outside the base. She noted, "I felt the level of that drill was different from that of drills carried out previously." She also said, "Their operations used to focus on logistical support, such as transportation and

TOKYO 00003447 005 OF 007

communications. Now I got the impression that they are directly connected with the battlefield." Concerning Zama City's policy

switch from opposition to the strengthening of base facilities to a soft policy line, she said, "I wonder in what direction Japan will head."

Kaneko touched on the circumstance of U.S. Army, "They presumably have yet to set specifics of the realignment." Once President-elect Obama assumes office, it would be possible for the U.S. to withdraw from Iraq. He pointed out, "(The deployment) may be lagging behind due to the economic slowdown."

(5) Administrative Reform Minister Akira Amari: Aso administration places priority on how future generations will assess it, and not on current popularity

TOKYO SHINBUN (Page 2) (Full)  
December 18, 2008

The future course of the administration of Prime Minister Taro Aso is seen as chaotic. With the approval rates for the Aso cabinet plunging in the polls, many LDP lawmakers are now trying to distance themselves from the prime minister. With an eye on dissolution of the House of Representatives and a general election next year, calls for political realignment are growing. This newspaper interviewed a ruling coalition member who may hold the key to the political situation next year.

-- The prime minister is having an uphill battle. What do you think are his good points?

Amari: Up close, he has his charm. Unexpectedly, he can talk about the heart of a matter with simple expression. In the recent summit of the leaders of Japan, China and South Korea, as well, he explained Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao the need to maintain the dollar-based currency system in ways easy to understand. His initiative in the trilateral summit was perfect.

-- The prime minister has often made slips of the tongue.

Amari: He should have had more simulations before making his remarks. The prime minister's aides should make arrangements by collecting necessary information beforehand.

-- The prime minister has put off dissolution of the House of Representatives, citing priority on policy over politics.

Amari: He made the right decision. The U.S.-originated financial crisis has gradually become serious. The United States is in the process of a transition of power and Europe has never experienced a financial crisis. I think he might have thought that he should not create a situation in which there would be no one in control in Japan, the U.S. and Europe.

-- Was there any chance for the prime minister to dissolve the Lower House?

Amari: There was the only one chance and that was immediately after he formed his cabinet. That option could have minimized the period of the absence of the prime minister. If the ruling coalition had won the election, the prime minister might have fulfilled his mission, suppressing the opposition-controlled House of

TOKYO 00003447 006 OF 007

Councillors.

-- Do you have any idea how to put an end to his plunging popularity?

Amari: The prime minister suggested the consumption tax should be increased in three years, although he was aware that a tax hike is unpopular. This could not be done by his predecessors. Somebody has to deal someday with the issue of securing stable fiscal resources for the social security system. Politics' true worth is to be appreciated by future generations in a decade or two decades later. It is not just going along with public opinion.

-- Some in the ruling camp are calling for a shuffle of the cabinet

and LDP leadership.

Amari: The prime minister probably has no intention to shuffle the cabinet and party executive lineup, but I agree it is one of his options. The current cabinet was formed based on the premise of Lower House dissolution. It was not a full-scale cabinet for making policies. I think there should be a dream team that would tackle the difficult situation of a century by appointing bigwigs who are policy experts to a new cabinet.

-- When do you think the prime minister will dissolve the Lower House?

Amari: It is not a matter that a cabinet member can easily talk about. However, the prime minister needs to dispatch a message how Japan will deal with the global financial crisis in order to stabilize the financial market. The prime minister has said that he will implement comprehensive economic measures such as the fiscal 2008 first and second supplementary budgets and the state budget for fiscal 2009 in succession. The government should at least come up with the outline of such comprehensive measures.

-- What is the role of the "NASA group" composed of the prime minister's close aides, including you?

Amari: We have risked our political life to support Mr. Aso since the majority of the party members did not back him. We don't want to be ridiculed by those who are riding on the trend. The group's principle is to take frankly with the prime minister. I think our group is playing some kind of roles in order to build a system to support the prime minister by the party as a whole, because all members are the central figures of the LDP factions.

-- Do you think the prime minister has changed?

Amari: Mr. Aso is always cheerful. He never lets his guard down even while drinking. He is great.

(Corrected copy) Foreign financial institutions cut 3,100 jobs, more than 10 PERCENT of Japanese payrolls, since last August

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Excerpts)  
December 18, 2008

Hit by the ongoing financial crisis, foreign-affiliated financial institutions have accelerated moves to slash jobs in Japan. Since credit woes stemming from the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis became serious in August of last year through mid-December of this year,

TOKYO 00003447 007 OF 007

3,100 jobs have been cut. The cuts amount to 11 PERCENT of the Japanese on their payrolls (about 28,000 persons). Foreign firms are expected to continue cutting jobs, and a total of 4,400 workers may be thrown out of work by the middle of 2009, according to a report produced by human resources consulting firm Executive Search Partners Co. yesterday.

U.S. and European financial institutions began to step up retrenchments in Japan in the wake of the failure of major U.S. brokerage house Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. in mid-September. With financial institutions saddled with massive losses stemming from turmoil in the markets, downsizing has spread from real estate and securitization to market trading, investment banking, asset management, and custodial services.

Goldman Sachs Japan Co., whose U.S. parent company logged its first quarterly loss since it was listed in 1999, has cut nearly 150 jobs in its investment banking, equities, custodial, and other operations. Credit Suisse has axed more than 70 workers mainly in its investment banking division as of the end of last week. Job cuts at these two firms account for 10 PERCENT of their total Japanese payrolls.

Deutsche Securities Inc. has slashed nearly 60 jobs in securitization and other sections. Morgan Stanley Japan Securities Co. and Merrill Lynch Japan Securities Co. have also reduced their

employees.

The Bank of America, a leading U.S. bank, plans to cut back its workforce across the world by up to 35,000 over the next three years, with its business integration with Merrill Lynch. European financial institutions are also stepping up cutbacks. Executive Search estimates that a total of 4,400 jobs at foreign financial institutions could be eliminated by the middle of 2009. This figure accounts for 16 PERCENT of their workforces in Japan.

ZUMWALT